

From my first visit to Washington, DC, the highlight of each trip was a morning run down the Mall. The routine never varied. I visited the memorials to Lincoln and Jefferson, stopping to read each inscription. Then I would walk through the Vietnam memorial, to sense the pain of loss suffered by so many and the hope of reconciliation and healing. I would circle the U.S. Capitol, an awe-inspiring monument to democracy.

Since my election to Congress six years ago, these runs have become a morning ritual, with the Mall's symbolic reminder of the significance of each day's work. Sadly, since September 11th, this source of pride and inspiration has become a daily reminder of our continuing inability to find intelligent ways to protect both our citizens and our national heritage.

Concrete barriers litter the landscape. They wall off our citizens not just from vital symbols of our government, but from the government itself. Visual blight is compounded by the disruption of pedestrian and vehicle movements in and around the Capitol and the White House. We are cheapening the experience of millions of visitors, as well as the thousands who work here. Even more troubling, these security measures may actually make people less safe.

These remedies create a false sense of security, while buildings and crowds remain vulnerable. By spending huge sums of money on only marginally useful construction, we divert money and attention from other more effective means. Worst of all, we may be putting people in danger. Transforming our most important and heavily trafficked public spaces into barrier-strewn obstacle courses will also interfere with rescue efforts in the event of actual attack or accident. Sadly, these cold, ugly and ineffective monuments to our fear mean that in a sense, the terrorists are winning another battle. They are taking away our public spaces and freedom of movement.

Poorly designed security measures can have a devastating effect on entire communities, not just tourists and government workers. The extended closure of National Airport resulted in the loss of hundreds of jobs, some perhaps permanently, and the displacement of thousands of others. The roads that have been closed around the Capitol and the White House have snarled traffic and frustrated commuters. Supposedly temporary actions have a way of becoming permanent. Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House was hastily closed after the Oklahoma City bombing and remains closed seven years later. Security measures that may have made sense temporarily have led to a seemingly permanent closure that has created costly traffic problems and a blighted scene in front of the home of our President.

Another example can be found on Washington's Capitol Hill, where new "no cycling" signs featuring a picture of a bicyclist with a red line slashed across it, have sprouted on the Capitol grounds. These newly restricted paths have long been used as a commuting route for residents on Capitol Hill. Their closure endangers the safety of cyclists who are now forced onto busy streets not designed to accommodate them. These signs haven't made Congress safer, but are a symbol of desperation and an inconvenience to hundreds of people making a personal choice to make our Capitol more livable by biking to work.

Fortunately, it does not have to be this way. There is a powerful alliance of planning and design professionals who are leading the way, summoning the faithful for a response to terrorism that creates safer spaces without losing what makes them so essential. The change is being led by the American Society of Landscape Architects, the American Institute of Architects, the American Planning Association, the Project for Public Spaces, the National Capital Planning Commission and other thoughtful people who are charting the path to greater security through creative design. With strategic use of landscaping, reinforced street furniture, building materials and the design of roads and sidewalks, safety and security objectives can be achieved without sacrificing the visitors' and workers' experiences.

If we are to provide security around the Capitol complex, airports, public buildings and other threatened places around the country without the concrete blocks and jersey barriers, we must treat these efforts as the major construction projects they are. That means careful planning and proper input from various professions, advocates, and community leaders. Doing it right will lead to designs that can alleviate questions of security without creating mini-fortresses walled off from their surroundings.

We must hurry. The Federal Government is set to despoil over 6,000 federal buildings around the country, creating ugly little islands of isolation - not only making them clearer targets, but also symbols of the gulf between our citizens and their government. It would be a shameful indictment of our stewardship if the most influential people in the design of our new century were Timothy McVeigh and Osama Bin Laden.

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